DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 983 FL 015 722

AUTHOR Kilpatrick, Paul
TITLE Turn and Control in Puerto Rican Spanish Conversation.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Discourse Analysis; English; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Interpersonal Communication; *Puerto Ricans; *Social Cognition; Sociocultural Patterns; *Spanish

ABSTRACT

An investigation of Puerto Rican Spanish conversational strategies involved analysis of recorded conversations for the amount of simultaneous speech, its context, and the turn-taking used. Overlapping and interruption were distinguished from cooperative (supportive) simultaneity of speech, and a "turn" was defined as a recognized utterance. The primary finding was a high degree of simultaneous speech, with over 90 percent of turns having some form of overlap or interruption. The conversational characteristics revealed in this analysis were compared to the characteristics of separate English and Spanish conversations between Spanish-English bilinguals, in which more simultaneous speech was found during the Spanish conversations. The contrast in conversational strategies underlines the different cultural perceptions of simultaneous speech as polite or impolite, and it suggests a need for a definition of "turn" that accommodates simultaneous speech differently and a need for further investigation of the quantitative and qualitative variation in simultaneous speech across languages. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED269983

TURN AND CONTROL IN PUERTO RICAN SPANISH CONVERSATION

BY:
Paul Kilpatrick

University of Puerto Rico
Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Paul Kilpatrick

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL015722

TURN AND CONTROL IN PUERTO RICAN SPANISH CONVERSATION

PAUL KILPATRICK
University of Puerto Rico
Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

This research grew out of a discussion with bilingual students of psycholinguistics regarding turntaking strategies in English conversation. When, in the discussion, we attempted to extend those rules to Puerto Rican Spanish, the students rejected the rules and claimed that there were no rules; that "everyone talks at once."

When they were asked, however, what might prevent them from speaking while someone else was speaking, they easily contributed several factors, including age, prestige, (including respect for position or respect for verbal ability of the speaker) and the content of what was being said.

Using this anecdotal information, Prof. Joan Gonzalez and I began a systematic investigation of Puerto Rican Spanish conversation which will eventually involve isolating the above factors to determine their effect on conversational strategies.

The initial phase, however, involved the analysis of several taped conversations observing the amount of simultaneous speech, its context, and its fit with previous definitions of <u>turn</u> in conversation.

Schegloff '68 gives what continues to be the operative definition for "turntaking." "The a b a b formula is a specification, for two party conversation, of the basic rule for conversation: <u>one party at a time</u> [emphasis his]. The strength of this rule can be seen in the fact that in a multi-party setting (more precisely, where there are four or more), if more than one person is talking, it can be claimed not

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

that the rule has been violated, but that more than one conversation is going on."

Sacks, et al. '74, claim anecdotally that "occurences of more than one speaker at a time are common but brief" and that "overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time."

Garvey and Berminger '81 set the figure for occurences of simultaneous speech among children at 5%.

Goodwin '81 notes the phenomenon of simultaneous speech and the difficulty it presents in defining turn but does not deal systematically with its effect on turn.

Feldstein and Welkowitz '78 have the most powerful definition of turn. Turn "begins the instant one participant in a conversation starts talking alone and ends immediately prior to the instant another participant starts talking alone."

This, however, is too powerful a constraint since it excludes altogether an utterance spoken by conversant B which begins after an utterance by A but concludes prior to the conclusion of A's utterance. Definitions of turn must account for the varieties of simultaneous speech identifiable in conversation.

A useful distinction in SS is made by Schegloff between overlap and interruption. This is based on whether the second speaker times his/her speech near a possible completion point which he calls overlap or whether it is timed in the middle of an utterance at a point which cannot be construed as a completion point, which he calls interruption.

Though not explicitly stated in Schegloff's definition of these terms, both of these types are considered to be bids for the floor.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I feel another contrast is necessary in order to resolve a current disagreement in the literature. Murray '85 uses the term "cooperative" to refer to comments such as "yeah" and "uhhuh" which are supportive of the speaker and not to be taken as an attempt to control the conversation. Murray dismisses cooperative utterances from consideration in defining turn.

Edelsky '81 also does not give turn status to "side comments which are off the record and back channel utterances or encouragers such as mmhmm".

Cherry and Lewis '76 on the other hand, suggest that "back channel acknowledgements such as uhhuh" terminate "the turn of a prior speaker and itself constitutes a claim to the floor."

I am claiming that cutting across the overlap-interruption distinction which is based on the timing of the simultaneity, is another functional distinction. The distinction I would posit, uses Murray's term "cooperative simultaneity" for back channeling and encouraging and contrasts it with "cooptive simultaneity" which lays claim to conversational control.

Cooperative speech plays a relatively minor role in English conversation and hence has a relatively minor role in the literture, with a few notable exceptions. For example, Reisman '74 gives an account of conversation in an Antiguan village, "Not only were there no norms against interruption, but there also seemed to be a prevailing pattern of 'counter noise' such that another's talking seemed to be good enough reason to begin talking himself at the same time."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Larson '85 found the same phenomenon in interaction among the Aguarunas of Peru. Describing one of her early encounters with the group, she writes; "As each [guest] arrived, the host greeted him loudly for several minutes, while the visitor simultaneously responded.... Such greetings often went on for an hour or two."

Because of the variation unacceptability of simultaneous speech and a lack of agreement as to what constitutes a turn, we first investigated the frequency of simultaneous speech in PRS and described "turn" in terms more appropriate to large quantities of SS.

To do this we made three separate recordings over a period of five months. Each involved four speakers who had been identified by performance in a conversational English class as ready conversationalists. This does not mean they were talkative or effusive but simply that they could engage in conversation with comparative ease.

They were instructed to talk about whatever they wanted and that there were no restrictions on subject matter or choice of words.

They were seated comfortably in a semicircle with the cassette recorder and video camera in plain view but with no investigator present. We disregarded the first three minutes of taping to allow them to become used to the situation but in all three cases they were settled into a conversation before we could set up the equipment and leave the room.

We used the first two groups to examine the amount of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

simultaneous speech and to develop a working definition of turn given the nature of PRS. The first group consisted of four men ages 20-23 who were native Puerto Ricans and whose first language was Spanish. Their acquired skill in English would be considered intermediate. The second group consisted of four women of approximately the same ages and language skills.

Our first task was to define "turn". We found it more helpful to use both the speaker and hearer of the turn under definition. Call the speaker A and the hearer B (for the purposes of the definition, B is called a hearer but s/he may also be speaking simultaneously.) If B (who may be silent or speaking) recognizes the utterance of A either by attentive silence, cessation from talking, or by attempts to maintain control (for example, by restarts, increased speed, volume, pitch, lexical markers such as "wait a minute", "excuse me", etc., intonation breaks, a syntactic break in the current utterance, or a semantic break or recast such as a sudden inclusion of backchanneled information) then a turn was established for A. If B was simultaneously speaking but recognizes A's utterance by one of the above mentioned markers then B can be said to have begun a new turn as well, provided A recognizes this utterance by either silence or attempting to maintain control. This, of course, allows for simultaneous turns. I am grateful to my friend Dale Russell for a summary definition, namely: "A turn is a recognized utterance." The word "recognized" refers to the hearer's role while the word "utterance" refers to the speaker's role.

With this working definition, we coded our data and began to look at the charateristics of conversation within this

framework.

The most striking observation from the first two recordings was the sheer quantity of SS. Unlike the references cited above which referred to SS in English as "rare" or "common but brief" based on the assumption that "one party talks at a time", our data revealed that PRS was overwhelmingly simultaneous. Given the definition of turn given above, we found over 90% of the turns had some form of interruption or overlap. We also found that the interruption/overlap distinction needed the additional cooperative/cooptive distinction to capture the types of SS recorded. All four cells in figure 1 were well represented.

After analysis of the two conversations, we then taped a group of four bilingual students, two men and two women, who had been judged by other bilinguals to be equally comfortable and proficient in both Spanish and English. The subjects confirmed that they did indeed feel equally comfortable and proficient in both languages. All four were born off the island but had spent the majority of their lives in PR. They were all acquainted with one another.

This group was asked to talk for 15 minutes beginning in English. An investigator then came into the room and asked them to switch to Spanish which they did. After another 15 minutes, the investigator interrupted again and excused them to eat lunch. After an hour, they began again, this time in Spanish and after 15 minutes were asked to switch into English for the final 15 minute period.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The same measure of SS to turn as described above was made on this group and the percentage was found to be even higher, possibly because they were acquainted. SS was measured in as many as 95% of the turns.

Lest our definition of turn be rejected and cast doubt on the conclusions, SS was also measured in real time by randomly choosing five 90 second slices of Spanish conversation and five 90 second slices of English conversation and then measuring the number of seconds in which two or more participants were speaking.

The interesting aspect of this measure is that while speaking Spanish, the conversants were more likely to speak simultaneously than when they spoke in English. On table 1, the measures are given for each and the level of significance, measured on a two tailed Student's T-test, $t=7.55$ with four degrees of freedom yield a $p<.002$.

This higher level discourse strategy was clearly language specific and though it also seemed to "interfer" with their English production so that there was a large quantity of SS in their English as well, SS was shown to be part of what a speaker knows when that speaker knows PRS.

The practical significance of these findings is dramatized by the literature on what SS might connote in an English speaking community. Welkowitz '81 found SS correlated with a "dominant personality." Natale '76 found an inverse relationship between individual social desirability and magnitude of initiated SS and Angermeyer and Hecker '80 used SS as one factor in analysis of social class and schizophrenia.

In popular opinion within English speaking society,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

initiating SS is generally considered to be rude or overly aggressive. Anecdotally, one of my Puerto Rican colleagues asked about our study and when I mentioned that I was studying the phenomenon of Puerto Rican's disposition to speak simultaneously with their conversants more often than their English speaking counterparts, he replied, "Of course, Puerto Ricans are more polite than Americans." He was viewing the phenomenon as a sign of politeness while many in an English speking culture view it as a sign of rudeness.

In conclusion, our study has shown a need for a definition of "turn" which takes into account larger amounts of SS. We posit the definition of turn as a "recognized utterance."

We have also shown SS, as a discourse feature, to vary from language to language within the same speakers. The variation is both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative in terms of sheer amount and qualitative in terms of function, to coopt or cooperate with the other speaker's turn.

We must now identify more specifically strategy variations and their effects in conversation.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Bibliography

Angermeyer, Matthais C., Hecker, Harmut. 1980. Communication Patterns in Normal and Disturbed Families. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Acapulco, Mexico, May 18-23, 1980). ERIC ED188257.

Cherry, L. & Lewis, M. 1976. Mothers and two year olds: A study of sex differentiated aspects of verbal interaction. *Developmental Psychology*, 12, 278-282.

Edelsky, C. 1981. Who's got the floor? *Language in Society* 10, 383-421.

Feldstein, S. & Welkowitz, J. 1978. A chronography of conversation: In defense of an objective approach. In A.W.Siegman & S. Feldstein, eds. *Nonverbal behavior and communication*. New York, Rinehart & Winston.

Garvey, C. & Berninger, G. 1981. Timing and turn taking in children's conversation. *Discourse Processes* 4, 27-57.

Goodwin, Charles, 1981. *Conversational Organization: Interaction between speakers and hearers.* New York, Academic Press.

Larson, M. 1986. Personal communication.

Murray, Stephen. 1985. Toward a model for recognizing interruptions. *Language in Society* 14, 31-40.

Natale, Michael. 1976. Need for social approval as related to speech: Interruption in dyadic communication. *Perception and Motor Skills* 42, 2, 455-458.

Reisman, K. 1974. Contrapunctual conversations in the Antiguan village. In R.Bauman & J. Sherzer eds. *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sacks, Harvey, Schegloff, Emanuel, & Jefferson, Gail. 1974. A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language* 50, 696-735.

Schegloff, Emanuel. 1968. Sequencing in Conversational Openings. *American Anthropologist* 70, 6, 1075-1095.

Welkowitz, Joan, Kaufman, Lloyd, & Sadd, Sue. 1981. Attribution of psychological characteristics from masked and unmasked conversations. *Journal of Communication Disorder* 14, 5, 387-397.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Kilpatrick
UPR-Mayaguez
LSA/AAAL
December 1985

TURN AND CONTROL IN PUERTO RICAN SPANISH CONVERSATION

	COOPTIVE (bid for the floor)	COOPERATIVE (not a bid for the floor)
OVERLAP (near a possible completion point)	Carlos: y por relajar na' mas William: [hay gente Paco: [pero William: [hay gente (0.1) disculpame (0.1) porque hay gente que compra...	Luz: y: (0.2) también (0.1) acueridate que (0.4) que los padres no te dan (0.2) pero te exigen, Alina: [eso es cierto
INTERRUPTION (not near a possible completion point)	Lisa: OK pero no ya (5 syllables) Nick: [a que (0.1) momento, momento	Luz: osea bregamos con la problematica [en el hogar Alina: ella quiere tener a bebé? Luz: si:: (0.2) ella lo quiere tener: (0.2) libremente

LEXICAL EXAMPLES

esperate	hay bendito
disculpame	Dios mio
mira	eso es cierto
pero	¿verdad?
begin a new utterance	bien/bueno
	muchacho/a
	repetition of earlier key phrase

PERCENTAGE IN REAL TIME OF TWO OR MORE PARTIES SPEAKING SIMULTANEOUSLY

Spanish	English
$\bar{x}$ = 29.44%	$\bar{x}$ = 16.88%

$t_{(n-1)} = 7.75$

$p < .002$